

Vermont Wins \$12 Million for High-Tech Medical Records System

BURLINGTON, February 12 – Almost \$12 million was awarded today to help Vermont doctors and hospitals move from paper records to state-of-the-art computerized medical records.

Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) said the funds will help state agencies, hospitals and doctors' offices develop a standardized system that will improve patient care and maintain the confidentiality and security of patient records.

Gov. Jim Douglas said Vermont has led the nation in innovative efforts to improve the quality of health care and slow the growth in costs.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded the Vermont Department of Human Services more than \$5 million. Another \$6.8 million will go to Vermont Information Technology Leaders, Inc. The Montpelier-based nonprofit is one of 32 organizations nationwide that will develop regional centers to coordinate health information technology.

The funds are from the economic recovery program that Congress approved last year.

Leahy, a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, secured another \$1.4 million over the last two years for VITL to work with doctors and independent pharmacies to adopt electronic medical records. "Electronic records hold the potential to provide billions in dollars of user savings to our health care system nationwide," he said. "These federal funds will help Vermont continue to lead the country in adopting medical records technology statewide. Better records mean better patient care and safety for Vermonters. They mean improved health outcomes, and they reduce the potential that small but significant details may be missed."

Sanders, a member of the Senate health committee, said the grants "will help us address soaring health care costs, reduce medical errors, and make it easier for patients to get quality care anywhere in the country."

Welch said, "Containing the ever-growing cost of health care is key to expanding access to all Americans, and adopting electronic health records is a critical step toward bending the cost curve. These grants will help medical providers and state agencies provide better care to patients, while contributing to efforts to drive down the cost of health care."

Douglas, cochairman of the National Governors Association State Alliance for eHealth, called widespread adoption of health information technology "a critical part of health care reform" and said the grants "will be a vital step forward in our efforts."

Nationwide, \$975 million in grants were awarded to help states and health care providers adopt health information technology and encourage doctors and hospitals to continue to move from paper to electronic record-keeping. The awards will help make health information technologies available to more than 100,000 hospitals and primary care physicians by 2014.

Modernizing and integrating the health care record-keeping system will reduce health costs for the federal government by more than \$12 billion over the next 10 years. The new records system also promises to reduce medical errors and vastly expand the amount of clinical data available for research.